

Loew's Palace Theatre  
1306 F Street NW  
Washington, D.C.

HABS No. DC-378

HABS,  
DC,  
WASH,  
249-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

## LOEW'S PALACE THEATRE

HABS,  
DC,  
WASH,  
249-

Location: 1306 F Street NW, Lot 22, Square 254, Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: The Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, 425 13th Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20004

Present Occupant and Use: Vacant; to be demolished.

Significance: The Loew's Palace Theatre was designed in 1917, by the prominent New York architect Thomas W. Lamb, an acknowledged pioneer of modern theater design. The Palace's facade forms part of a row of nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings at the western end of the busy downtown commercial district. The theater lobby occupies a narrow rectangular site, sharing party walls with the adjoining retail buildings. The three-story auditorium, which occupied a large lot around the corner along Thirteenth Street, was demolished in 1978. The eclectic lobby of Loew's Palace is all that remains of this once-elegant L-shaped theater.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1917 (permit #991, 4/28/17)
2. Architect: Thomas W. Lamb, New York, New York. Lamb had a career which included over 300 theaters to his credit, beginning in 1909.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Lot 22, where the lobby is located, has been owned by C.C. Willard or his estate until officially transferred to Walter Willard Boyd in 1940 (Liber #7563, Folio 289). Purchase by PADC occurred in 1978. Lots 30, 31, and 32, the other three, were purchased by Anchor from Catherine Lannon, who had maintained the property since 1914 (purchased from Susan Fletcher in 1890).
4. Builder: Fleischman Construction Company
5. Original plans and construction: The original plans for Loew's Palace Theatre have been obtained from the Theater Management and Columbia Palace Corporation, New York, several copies of which are included in the supplemental material.

"The plaster ornamentation, all molded specially for the

theater, was painted in soft colors ranging across the spectrum from gray to amber and gold. A chandelier - described as a 'structure of delicate tracery, with star-like lights in the openings' - hung from the dome. An account of the theater in the 1920s captures something of its vanished splendor:

'The furniture throughout is of brown mahogany, upholstered in red mohair, all in the Adam style, to harmonize with the architecture of the house. A smoking room for men and a restroom for women are located on the mezzanine promenade, the former furnished with large leather-covered chairs and the latter in black and gold Chinese lacquer. A large fireplace has been installed in the smoking room over which is a mantle surmounted by a very rare specimen of Mandarin embroidery. The restroom has been furnished with a Chinese wallpaper of striking design.'

(From "Broken Dreams", Stephen Zito, "The Washingtonian", March 1979)

6. Alterations and additions: In 1918 (permit #1211, 10/16/18), a V-shaped metal sign with 1000 lights (each 10 watts), was placed on the marquee which remained for several years. Twenty years later the full-story upper facade, in reality a one-story parapet wall, was built (permit #214752, 7/15/38). Three months later, the existing metal molding on the marquee was altered with etched glass (permit #217832, 10/28/38).

Extensive remodeling again in 1964 altered the interior; the mezzanine promenade was removed and the entire interior was painted fire engine red (no permit available - source: Stephen Zito, "Broken Dreams", "The Washingtonian", 3/79). The lobby was left vacant following demolition of the theater in 1978.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary sources:

District of Columbia Building Permits, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

District of Columbia Deed Records      Recorder of Deeds, Washington, D.C.

2. Secondary sources:

All of the following are available at the Washingtoniana Division of the Martin Luther King Branch of the D.C. Public Library.

Baist Real Estate Atlas Collection

D.C. City Directories, 1865-79

D.C. General Assessment Records

Zito, Stephen. "Broken Dreams". "Washingtonian" March 1979

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Loew's Palace Theatre includes a simple facade with Art Deco styling. The distinctiveness of the architect's work lies in the decoration of large and monumental interior spaces. This building incorporates baroque and classical elements.
2. Condition of fabric: The lobby is the only section of the theater that remains. The F Street doors to the lobby are completely boarded up, and the back wall to the lobby is filled in with cement blocks. This factor probably contributes to the good condition of the remaining fabric.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The one-story extant building measures 30' x 100', and is approximately 45' high at the facade. The demolished theater measured approximately 105' x 148' and stood three stories tall.
2. Foundations: Cement and steel
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The lower part of the facade is clad in glazed terra cotta. The entrance to the building is marked by a large metal marquee projecting over the sidewalk and extending to curbside. Although radically altered with the 1938 remodeling, the marquee retains its original coffered metal ceiling. At one time the marquee displayed a V-shaped metal sign containing one thousand lights. The upper portion of the facade is a one-story parapet wall added to the existing lobby roof, held in place from the rear by a steel structure. This addition increased the height of the theater and provided a more imposing appearance. The eclectic detailing of this upper portion bears a close stylistic resemblance to the adjacent Brownley Building. This windowless upper section is faced with limestone panels, and forms a full height concave recess over the entrance. Four fluted pilasters, with neither bases nor capitals, rise from the first story parapet to a more stylized entablature which terminates the facade. A narrow vertical sign with an Art Moderne design projects perpendicularly from the center of the concave facade recess of the upper facade; and carries the words "Loew's Palace" in red neon letters.
4. Structural system and framing: Brick, cement, and steel
5. Openings: Four double doors set in a predominantly glazed partition of bronze are still intact at the recessed entrance to the theater.
6. Roof: Both the extant and demolished roof are flat. Steel

structural frame (brace) for the full-story parapet rests on the roof of the extant lobby.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The remaining portion of the building is divided into three major areas: a vestibule, a large lobby, and a stairway which leads to the theater. The vestibule, though now enclosed by a plywood partition at the sidewalk line, remains intact. It is an open space with a free standing ticket booth at the center. Its vault runs perpendicular to the entrance axis. The theater lobby is entered through four double doors that are set into a predominantly glazed partition. The strong focus toward the axis end is emphasized by a slight downward pitch of the floor and the direction of the ceiling vault. The room's end wall (south) consists of an arcaded stairway with three entrances to the theater. At the central arch there is a straight-run staircase that ascends to an open balcony which in turn led to the upper tier seats. The side arches open onto staircases leading down to the former orchestra. Each side wall behind the arcade contains two empty niches. The lobby space is separated from this arcaded section and the vestibule by the elaborate entablature that runs along the room's periphery, resting on the side colonnades at east and west; on the arcade on the south, and spanning the full width without any apparent supports above the glazed entrance screen.
2. Stairways: A closed string marble stairway leads from the lobby to the balcony. A wrought-iron balustrade springs from an ornate newel that tapers forward at the base. The hand-rail is tubular brass, circular in section. The ceiling behind the arcade is coffered, but is simpler than that in the lobby.
3. Flooring: The vestibule has a floor design consisting of rectangular areas of vinyl tile (a later addition), surrounded by terrazzo bands. In the lobby floor this design is continued in terrazzo panels enclosed by marble bands.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The finishes throughout are quite luxuriously executed with great attention to detailing. On each sidewall of the lobby there is a tripartite display cabinet matching the freestanding ticket booth. On the same sidewalls, above the cabinets, there is a rectangular haut-relief stucco panel featuring a central Apollo playing music to flanking dancing nymphs. The vaulted ceiling carries a similar plaque displaying more bucolic motifs.

The marble wainscott on the side walls of the lobby features a crown molding. The freestanding columns are marble with unfluted shafts and fluted capitals. Fluted pilasters stand behind the columns. There is a keystone with a woman's head

in relief at the center of each arch. The spandrels feature an oval cartouche without inscriptions. The entablature that runs the room's full perimeter is embellished with a repetitive design of alternating palmettes and garlanded urns. The vaulted ceiling that springs from this support is coffered. The tympanum between the barrel vault and the entablature features a stucco relief with classical motifs.

D. Site:

This building is on the south side of F Street, facing north. Due to its proximity to Pennsylvania Avenue and the White House, F Street (between 9th Street and 15th Street) has been the center of Washington's commercial activity throughout its history. Today, the street is composed of buildings in a variety of architectural styles, dating from the 19th and early 20th centuries. F Street contains predominantly four to five story buildings with one or two ten to fourteen story buildings occurring on each block. In the 1300 block, three tall structures exist: the National Press Building, Bond's, and the American Building. The strong architectural cohesion of this block reflects the fact that most of the buildings were constructed within a ten-year period (1922-32), and that the three buildings located at 1310-1322 F Street were designed by the same architectural firm, Marsh and Peter. All buildings on the block exhibit great care in architectural detailing and ornamentation, particularly at the street level. Such care and deliberation of design in this block of F Street has enhanced the pedestrian path and reduced the image of grand scale to that of human proportion.

Prepared by: Anderson, Notter/Mariani  
Historic Preservation Consultants for PADC

Wendy Hunter  
Architect for PADC  
December 1979

PART III. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Photocopies of original architectural drawings (reduced proportions of contact prints taken from 11" x 14" negatives included in field material). See attached.

- A. West elevation
- B. Plan of roof
- C. East elevation
- D. Plan of main floor
- E. Plan of second mezzanine

- F. Plan of balcony
- G. Cross section, looking toward stage
- H. Cross section, through mezzanine, looking toward stage
- I. Plans of roof, basement, and cross sections of lobby building
- J. Plans of lobby: ceiling, entrance, floor section
- K. Mezzanine ceiling
- L. Auditorium ceiling

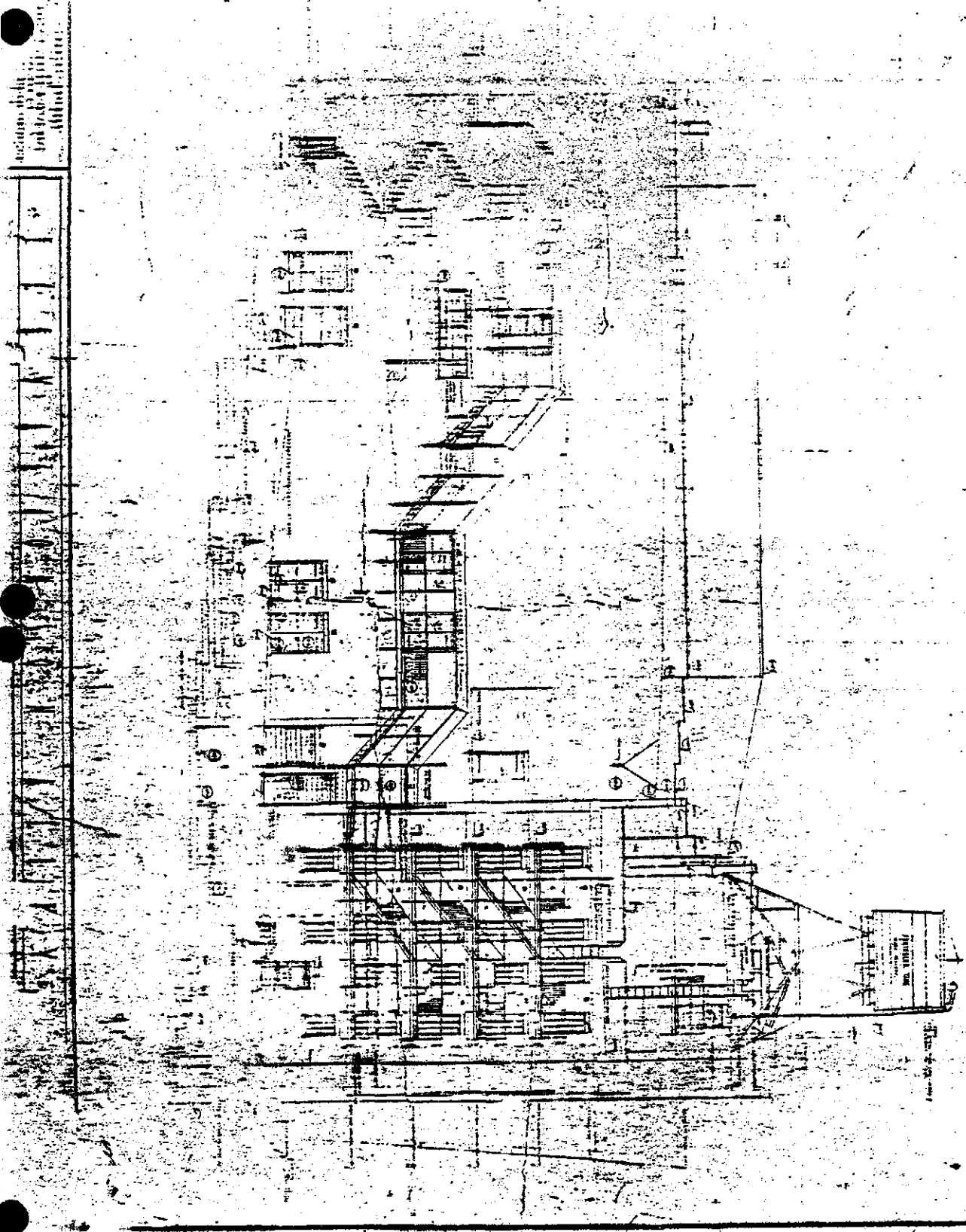
Prepared by: Anderson, Notter/Mariani  
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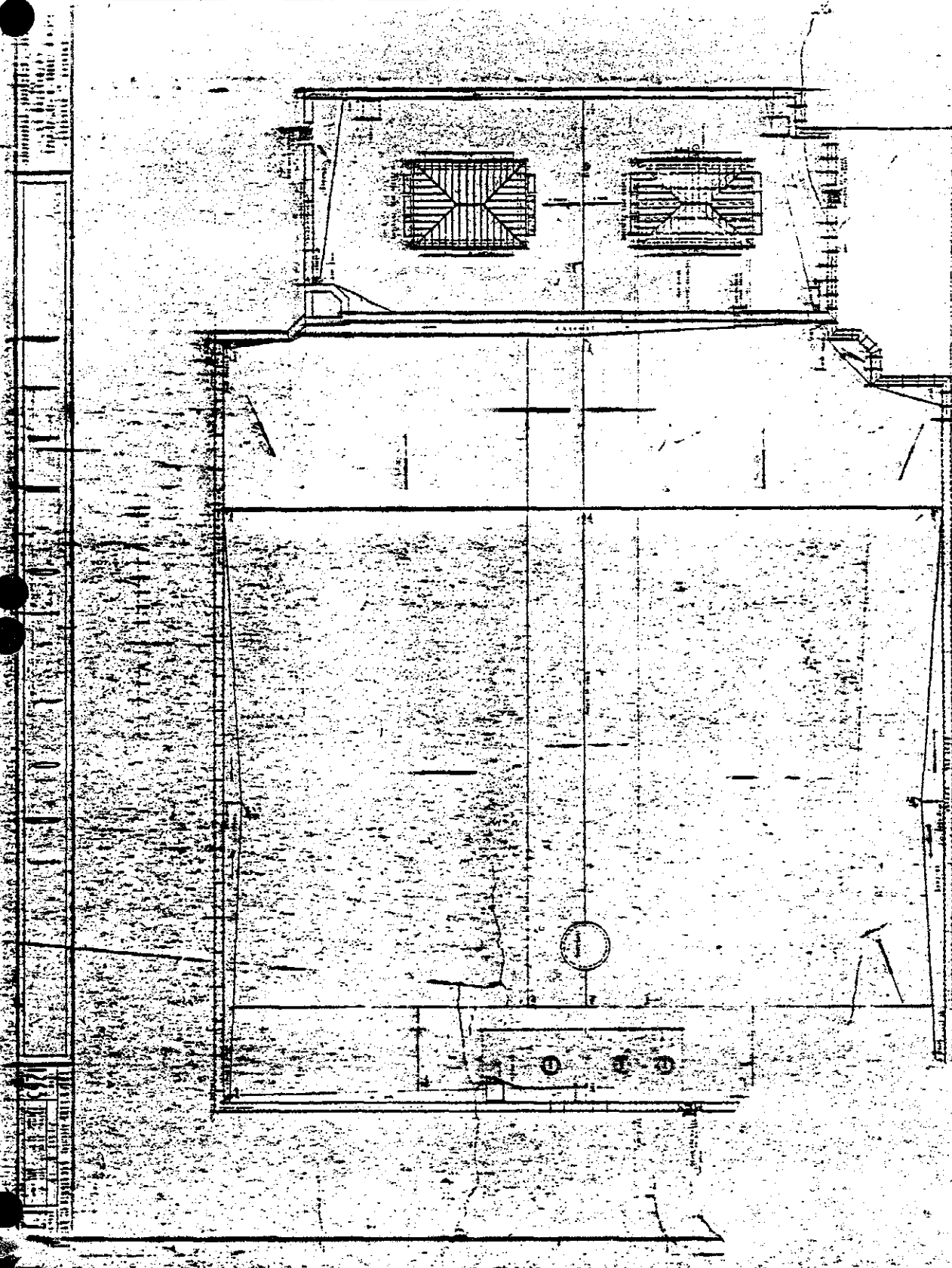
Robert S. Lange  
Historic American Buildings Survey  
June 1980

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort in the completion of the Pennsylvania Avenue development plan. John A. Burns, AIA, and Emily J. Harris were the HABS project coordinators. The records were prepared under the general supervision of Jeffrey S. Wolf, Architect with PADC. Historic data was compiled by PADC consultants in historic preservation Anderson, Notter/Mariani, and expanded by Wendy Hunter, Architect with PADC. Photographs were taken by Jeffrey S. Wolf in December 1979. The data was edited and prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by Emily J. Harris and Robert S. Lange, architectural historians in the HABS office, June 1980.







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